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061507Z Jan 06

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000049

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2016

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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL MONITOR GROUP'S GOAL TO ANNOUNCE FINDINGS BEFORE IRAQI ELECTION RESULTS OUT

REF: BAGHDAD 0022

Classified By: POL Couns Robert S. Ford, reason 1.4 (d)

1. (C) In a January 5 meeting, the international monitoring group (IMIE) representative Mazen Chouib confirmed to Poloff that the IMIE assessment team's goal is to produce a preliminary statement on their findings before the Iraqi election commission (IECI) announces its own preliminary election results. Though not an assessor himself, Chouib has taken the lead in organizing the IMIE team. He noted to Poloff that, while the team's personalities required special handling, the group was proceeding well and the IECI was being extremely cooperative.

2. (C) Chouib mentioned to Poloff that it is too early to detail the IMIE assessment, but the team had not discovered any major problems with the electoral process. Chouib did say, however, the IECI did not appear always to be thoroughly investigating complaints. There also appeared to be procedural and legal weaknesses regarding how IECI punished staff implicated in fraud. He also noted that the IECI may have weaknesses in the way it pursues allegations of fraud by its staff.

3. (C) Chouib said the team would be meeting with the group complaining loudest against the election results, MARAM, by January 5. Thus, that group's complaints had not yet been incorporated into IMIE's analysis. Ibrahim al-Janabi, Chief of Staff to Ayad Allawi, confirmed to Poloff January 5 that this meeting had been scheduled.

4. (C) Separately, UN election advisory team leader Jenness told PolCouns late January 6 that the IECI would likely not announce even the preliminary election results until mid-January (after the Muslim 'eid holiday which is to conclude roughly January 12). Jenness anticipated the IECI might give a detailed briefing to the press about the complaints process prior to the 'eid.

5. (C) Comment: Our sense is that the international monitoring group and the UN team are in enough contact that we are likely to have no problems about timing of announcements. Our own sense is that the election commission does not have a strong internal investigation capacity. We anticipate that IMIE observations about Iraqi election commission weaknesses will strengthen demands, especially from Sunni Arabs, for major changes to the election commission during this year.

KHALILZAD